

I. Introduction

Good morning! Last week we read about how Paul departed on his third missionary journey after spending some time in Antioch. Paul travelled through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia and strengthened the disciples in the towns that he had visited before. Then he turned south and took the inland road to Ephesus, a leading city of the Roman province of Asia.



Paul probably travelled the same road on this journey that the Holy Spirit did not permit him to take in **Acts 16:6**, where it says, **“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.”** The Lord has a time for each activity. In accord with His plan, Paul’s major work to reach the province of Asia was delayed until Paul’s third missionary journey. And so, at the right time, Paul went to Ephesus and made it the base of operations for reaching the whole province of Asia.

Last week I promised to share more about Ephesus, so let’s take a moment for that. Ephesus was a thriving city of about 250,000 people in Paul’s time. These photos are only a small introduction to the city. The first photo shows the large theater, which could seat 25,000 people. Ephesus was a wealthy city as evidenced by streets made of marble and some with mosaics (photo #2). Some of the homes were large and beautiful (photo #3) with decorated walls on the inside (photo #4). The library of Celsus (photo #5) is one of the most impressive ruins, although it was not yet built when Paul was there. The importance of Ephesus to the ancient church is demonstrated by the ruins of Saint John’s Basilica (photo #6) that includes the traditional grave site of John and this beautiful cross-shaped baptismal (photo #7). A traditional grave site of Saint Luke (photo #8), the author of the Gospel of Luke and of Acts is also at Ephesus, but most historians think that Luke actually died in Egypt and was buried in the city of Thebes there instead. So, perhaps this stone marker is just a memorial to Luke rather than a grave site, or maybe it is the grave of one of Luke’s associates rather than Luke himself.



There are always some unresolved questions about the details of history. But what I want to impress upon you is not the details, but the big picture. The big picture of history and the historical evidence strongly supports the Bible as a reliable historical document. There are many amazing things in Scripture, but we can be confident when we read the Bible that we are reading true stories about real people and real places.

Let’s go on and read our Scripture for today, Acts 19:11-22.

II. Scripture Reading (Acts 19:11-22, NIV)

11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. 13 Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out."

14 Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" 16 Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. 17 When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.

18 Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. 19 A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. 20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. 21 After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." 22 He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

III. Teaching

This passage is a small window into the invisible supernatural world that exists alongside the natural world that we see every day. There is a battle between good and evil going on all the time and we need to be ready for this spiritual warfare. People often ask why God doesn't just get rid of all the evil and make the world safe. But it is not so easy.



The famous dissident Russian author, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who revealed to the world the awful reality of the Soviet labor camps in his book, "The Gulag Archipelago," put the problem this way: *"If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"*

We should remember that when we wish for evil to be destroyed, we ourselves are not safe, because there is evil in every human heart. The spiritual battle between good and evil is focused on the human heart. Who, or what, will we give our heart to? The devil and his demons seek to draw our hearts away from God with many temptations. The devil doesn't care very much what trap you fall into. He is delighted whether you fall into the sin of pride, greed, sorcery, idol worship, sexual sin, or a thousand other things. The devil's goal is simply to draw your heart away from God.

The Christian walk is a life of making the decision every day to give our hearts to God. This is not easy because we have an enemy who constantly seeks to tempt us to sin. **1 Peter 5:8** warns us, **"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."**

Fortunately for us, although the devil is powerful, there are severe limits to his power. In fact, compared to the power of God, the power of the devil is very tiny. If we imagine that the power of God is like the size of the earth, then the power of the devil would be less than one grain of sand in the bottom of a footprint on the beach. God can wash away the devil and all of the demons with a single wave anytime that God decides to do so. The forces of good and evil are not evenly matched as some people imagine. In reality, the power of God is vastly greater than the forces of evil.



When it is time to destroy evil, God will cast the devil and the demons into hell, but until that time, the spiritual battle continues all around us. Some people may wonder why God delays, but we can be sure that God knows what He is doing. Everything has its purpose. The existence of the devil gives mankind a clear choice. We each have to choose. Will we believe the devil's lies and follow the devil and his evil ways? Or will we see the devil for what he is, a liar and a murderer, and reject him and choose to follow God and His ways instead? God has given us a clear choice. Will we choose to walk with Him?

The people of Ephesus were also given a clear choice. Paul preached the Good News of Jesus and God confirmed the truth of Paul's words through extraordinary miracles. **Acts 19:11-12, "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them."** I like how the NIV translates this, these were, "**EXTRA-ordinary miracles.**" God does not follow recipes in His work, so it is always foolish to try to duplicate a miracle, but it would be even more foolish to try to duplicate an, "**EXTRA-ordinary,**" miracle.

I mention this because if you go on the internet you can find people quoting this verse and selling so-called, "blessed handkerchiefs." These people say they are duplicating the miracles of Acts 19:11-2, but actually they are duplicating the more secular miracle of turning other people's money into their own money. Any successful ministry, or business for that matter, will attract copycats who want to get in on the action. There are many scams, but we want to be wise and not foolish.

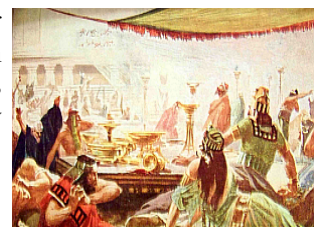
Paul attracted some copycats but they soon learned that it is not a good idea to use the Name of Jesus unless you actually know Jesus. **Acts 19:13-15, "Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, 'In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.' Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. The evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?'"** Who are you? We should all be prepared to answer this question. Notice, it is not enough to know about Jesus. It is not enough to copy Paul's words. To find safety from the powers of evil, we must have a personal relationship with Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We should be prepared, when the devil comes to ask, to tell him that we are adopted sons and daughters of God, bought by the death of Jesus on the cross and washed clean by His blood. When we resist the devil with gospel truth and saving faith, he will flee.

These seven men are said to be the son of a Jewish chief priest called Sceva, but there was no high priest in Jerusalem by that name, so either Sceva was a nickname, or Sceva was a man who was called high priest by some sect of Jews, but not a true high priest in Jerusalem. Anyway, these seven sons were working as exorcists, but apparently they knew their methods were ineffective since they were trying to copy Paul. But when Paul used the Name of Jesus, Paul was expressing his faith in Jesus. These guys were just trying to use the Name of Jesus like some kind of magic phrase and that doesn't work. **Acts 19:16, "Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding."**

On this day, these seven men lost their clothes, their pride, and their jobs as exorcists. They also lost some blood and gained some bruises. But maybe they learned from this. If this humiliation caused them to seek a real relationship with Jesus, then it was a blessing in disguise. Some people always have to learn the hard way. It would have been much easier to listen to Paul and come to faith in Jesus through Paul's teaching. But even if we have to learn the hard way by getting beat up by the forces of evil, it is far better to enter into faith in Christ with some bruises than to miss out on Jesus altogether.

It is interesting how God uses even the actions of the devil for the salvation of many. The evil spirit may have thought that his power would be recognized after he beat up the seven brothers. But that was not what happened. Take a look at **Acts 19:17-18, "When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds."** The open demonstration of evil violence caused the people to confess their sins and turn to Jesus even more.

After this, the people who had practiced sorcery brought out all of their scrolls of secret spells, magic and fortune telling and burned them in public. Such scrolls were sold for very high prices. In this case, the value of the scrolls that was burned was estimated at 50,000 silver coins. I think some people might ask why



they didn't sell the scrolls and give the money to the poor. But once you know that something is a lie and a trap, how could you pass it on to someone else? If you bought some expensive medicine and then discovered it was poison, would you sell it to someone else? Of course not!

The new believers in Ephesus demonstrated their repentance from things that God hated through decisive action. But please notice one more thing: no one coerced them into giving up their valuable scrolls. They each made the decision to repent and destroy their own scrolls. No one took or damaged another person's property; each repented on their own. For repentance to be real, it must come from the repentant heart of the person and not from outside pressure.

The evil spirit attacked the seven sons of Sceva and beat them. This was a bad thing. But God used it for good and for the salvation of many. This gives us, perhaps, an insight into why God has not yet removed the forces of violence and hate from this world. The work of demons and bad men actually causes people to seek God and to come to faith and salvation in Jesus. The result is that many more are saved and adopted into the family of God. There are many examples of this in Scripture once we open our eyes to see them.

IV. Conclusion

In this world, there is trouble of every kind, suffering, sickness, and death. We are in the midst of a spiritual war for the hearts of men and women and the effects of that war are visible everywhere. But none of the things that happen are without meaning or purpose. **Romans 8:28** assures us, **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”**

Jesus has already defeated the devil and the powers of evil through His completed work on the cross. He is Lord and He is alive and watching over us all. And, because He is with us, we are able to stand on this spiritual battlefield with joy and peace. As His people, the people of God, we engage in spiritual warfare for the souls of men and women. Our weapons are the things of the gospel of Christ: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, prayer, and the Word of God. The Holy Spirit living within us leads and guides us and protects us from the enemy.

Let's close with a Scripture that helps us to remember these things, **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**, **“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”**

V. Prayer

Let's pray!